

# SOLIDARITY

A Journal of Libertarian Socialism. Issue 18. Autumn 1988. 80 Pence



## **The New China**

**Western solutions bring Western problems**

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## **Self-Management**

**Being realistic, demanding the impossible**

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COVER PICTURE: Passengers at Changchun railway station, Manchuria await their train. In China's decade of change, how have they fared? Over the last ten years, for example, the One-Child population policy has resulted in 104 million fewer births, and 'saved the state' £158 billion. Photo: Laurie Sparham (Network).

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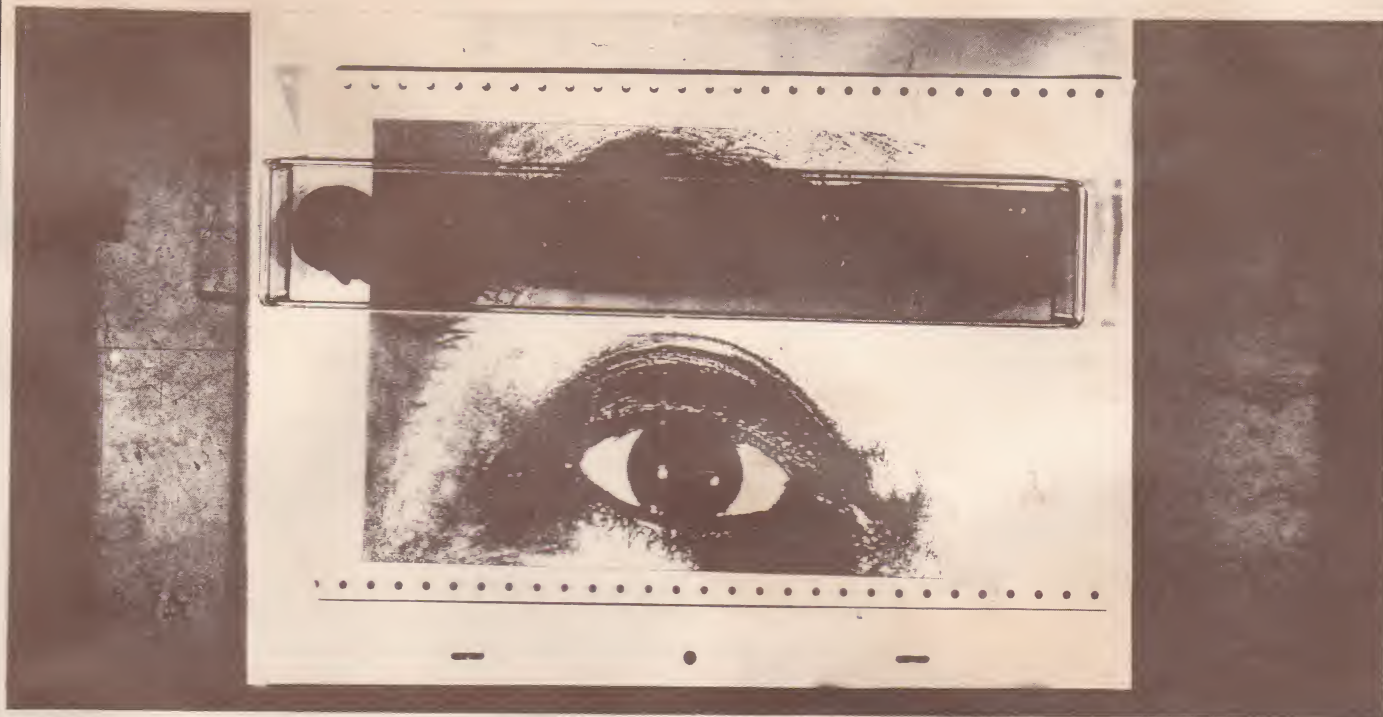
PUBLISHING HISTORY: The present Solidarity Journal is the latest in a line of magazines produced by the Solidarity Group and stretching back to the early sixties. Solidarity for Workers' Power, first in this sequence, was founded in 1960 and ran to 89 issues. This was succeeded by the nationally produced Solidarity for Social Revolution, which ran for 16 issues, and was in turn succeeded by the present title. Our publishing history is complicated further by the existence, in the sixties and early seventies, of six or seven regional Solidarity magazines, among them those produced by the Scottish, South Wales, and North Western Solidarity groups; and by the publication of the short-lived, nationally produced magazine, Solidarity for Workers' Self-Management.

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AS WE SEE IT

SELF-MANAGEMENT



# Necessary condition

What is it that makes libertarian socialism so different? Precisely what set apart the demands of French workers and students in 1968, argues S K FRENCH, the insistence on self-management.

**I**N EARLY MAY 1968, thousands of French students occupied the Sorbonne and the Nanterre precincts of the University of Paris, following a number of strikes and boycotts. The Rector of the University invited the French riot police, the hated CRS, to remove them. Students were arrested and beaten up.

Demonstrations in the streets of the Latin Quarter followed, and on May 10 the area was occupied and barricades erected. The CRS were ordered to clear the streets... the resulting brutality, shown clearly on French television, horrified large sectors of the French

population and created much sympathy for the students. As a result the French trade unions decided to call a one-day general strike. Student militants began to make contact with workers, despite the opposition of the Communist Party-controlled Confederation General du Travail. At first hesitantly, later with increasing confidence, workers, especially young workers, went to the university buildings to participate in political discussion.

A wave of strikes and factory occupations spread throughout France. Eventually, trade union leaders managed to negotiate



'normal working' in return for wage increases. But money was not the prime issue. The workers' demands, exemplified by the thousands of leaflets produced jointly by workers and students, were about conditions of work, control of production by workers, the purpose of production itself. A leaflet at Renault read: "As workers we should ourselves seek to control the operation of our enterprises. Our objectives are similar to those of the students. The management of the industry and the management of the university should be democratically ensured by those who work there". Another from the Rhone-Poulenc factory stated "...the students are challenging the whole purpose of bourgeois education. They want to take the fundamental decisions themselves. So should we. We should decide the purpose of production, and at whose cost production will be carried out".

The demands of the students and workers were, as many of them quickly came to realise, a questioning of the whole organisation of capitalist society and its division of people into order-givers and order-takers. They amounted to a demand that society be reconstructed on the basis of the greatest possible democracy, not only within the organisation of production itself, inside the factories (the self-management of production), but also in deciding the actual purposes of production (the self-management of society). This is the key issue which distinguishes a socialist society from all other forms of social organisation: the distinction between those who decide and those who carry out the decisions has to be abolished.

Socialists have traditionally been concerned with opposing poverty, the exploitation of workers by their bosses, militarism, colonialism, and more recently with racism, sexism and the destruction of the environment. These remain issues of vital importance. But the concentration in Marx's later writings on the

exploitation of workers defined by the labour theory of value, coupled with the apparent success of leninism as a mode of revolutionary organisation (a politically advanced leadership directing a less advanced proletariat), has obscured for would-be revolutionaries our exclusion from control over our own lives. Such exclusion, resulting from hierarchical organisation, is more significant as a source of revolutionary libertarian instinct than almost anything else. Imagine a world state in which racism and war have been suppressed because no longer functional, everyone gets enough to eat and a place to live, but fundamental inequalities of power remain and decisions are made by all-powerful leaders; this would not be socialism as libertarian socialists choose to use the term, however well it may match up to the definitions of leninists (indeed, a well run prison is not so very different).

**T**he impulse for control of our own lives (self-management) is a fundamental part of human nature. It is the urge to make life meaningful. People have to be able to exercise this desire in some part of their lives in order to function as human beings, and where the possibility is totally denied, they rapidly cease to act at all save by the direction of others, after which they die. (This was demonstrated in Nazi concentration camps, where, typically, middle-class Jews, who regarded themselves as indistinguishably integrated into gentile society, suddenly found themselves treated as criminals for no reason they could understand. They became withdrawn, would not even move unless ordered, and quickly lost the will to live. Those who understood why they were persecuted - political prisoners, conscientious objectors - were the most successful in adapting psychologically).

Self-management, although essential to a socialist society,



is not, however, sufficient in itself. After all, bosses and dictators control their own lives. Socialism must also be democratic, to enable the greatest number of people to exercise self-management, not only in production but in all public areas of life. In revolutionary situations, workers have almost instinctively organised general assemblies within their factories (for example, soviets in Russia in 1905 and 1917, workers' councils in Germany in 1919 or in Hungary in 1956) open to all involved in the factory, as a mechanism to enable the views of all to be heard. It is from these historical precedents that we draw the conclusion that the general assemblies will be an essential part of socialism, and its defining characteristic.

Such assemblies must be created outside production as well, to enable local communities (and beyond them society in general) to determine the tasks of production: what is to be produced, what may be an acceptable level of pollution, what transport systems may be required; all the questions which go beyond the narrow confines of the factory itself. The precise form of these bodies is likely to vary greatly from place to place; their basic content is not. It is to be expected that as far as possible decisions will be delayed until consensus is reached between differing viewpoints; on occasion, however, decisions may have to be made on a majority basis. To the extent that it will be necessary to have higher-level decision-making assemblies of delegates (modern communication technology may reduce the need for this), such delegates must be subject to immediate recall (and not 'representative' like our MPs, who can vote as they please, subject only to the need not to offend their party managers if they don't want to be 'deselected' before the next general election).

In order to ensure that delegates do comply with their mandates, it might perhaps be necessary to

provide that all decisions made by delegate assemblies shall be subject to ratification by the assemblies within so many days or else lapse. This would provide the chance not only for the removal of recalcitrant delegates, but also for calm consideration of decisions taken in the heat of the moment.

All this may sound slow compared with management by 'experts', and in the short term it might well be. But it is likely that after the initial 'chaotic' period of the reorganisation of society along these lines, the need for constant discussions at great length on all subjects under the sun will diminish. Decisions reached in a way felt to be democratic by those who they affect will probably be accepted more readily even by those who originally opposed them. They will therefore be implemented in a more efficient manner than at present, where sabotage, go-slows, and all the other forms of workers' resistance occur constantly.

Less rapid decision-making is a small price to pay for a way of life in which people can develop their human potentialities to the full. It must be recognised, however, that there is no mechanism which human beings can devise which will provide a guarantee against manipulation or bureaucratic methods and the re-establishment of hierarchical power structures. The only guarantee is the active participation by people in managing their own lives and making decisions for themselves. The exclusion of people from decision-making in one area of life inevitably tends towards their exclusion from all other areas, and reinforces their tendencies towards apathy and withdrawal into private life. Socialism depends on people's determination to be citizens in the old sense, to participate to the full in public life; or to put it another way, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.



## CHINA

# The Westernisation of practically everything

The dozen years since Mao Tse Tung's death have seen the most unlikely departures from orthodox Communist policy on the part of the Chinese leadership. Today, even the casual visitor is struck on all sides by evidence of rapid Westernisation. Can Party mandarins have really lost both their trust in Communism and their mistrust of capitalism at one and the same time, as some observers suggest?

ANDY BROWN, just back from Beijing, reports.

**S**INCE MAO'S DEATH in 1976, many major changes in policy have taken place inside China. The policies of the power clique which gathered around Mao had left the economy in such a mess that drastic change of some kind was necessary. What has surprised and astonished many Westerners has been the speed and nature of these changes. Private ownership of land has returned, there are experiments with share ownership and bankruptcy, small private businesses have reappeared, competitive examination results have been reintroduced, and the television stations now carry advertisements for foreign programmes. In a little over ten years the policies of the Party appear to have undergone a complete turnabout; and on one level the new policies appear to have worked - the economy is booming, and agricultural output in particular has improved.

One of the beneficial side effects of these changes is that restrictions on travel within China have gradually been eased. The result is that, with the recent and important exception of Tibet, it is now possible for foreigners to travel virtually wherever they wish. With this freedom (still denied to the majority of Chinese) you frequently come across direct evidence of the massive changes taking place in Chinese society.

One of the most immediately obvious results of the switch in the approach of the Chinese Communist Party is that it has created a very rapid increase in the wealth of both individuals and of the country as a whole. Before I arrived in China many of my images of the country had come from television documentaries of Chinese village life. Consequently, the first sight of a Chinese city came as something of a shock. Large





THE MUCH TRAVELLED ROAD TO THE TOWN: A village outside Xiamen, South East China.

parts of several Chinese cities, such as Beijing (Peking), Guangzhou and Hangzhou, consist of broad roads along which are situated modern blocks of flats which would not look out of place on a British housing estate. In the southern town of Guilin the advertising hoardings have posters of movie stars and of women who have rejected their natural appearance in favour of heavy make up to make them look more 'Western'. In Guangzhou there are flashing neon signs little different to those of Hong Kong.

On the streets of Shanghai in summer most people are dressed in smart fashions and shops are crowded with customers who have money to spend and who, unlike in most Communist countries, appear to genuinely want the consumer goods on offer. Chinese people who speak English voice admiration for the American lifestyle and seem to be

mainly interested in getting a good job and some nice possessions. Bizarrely, it is even possible to come across such trappings of the Western lifestyle as snooker halls. A steadily growing number of market traders are setting up their own businesses and haggling over prices. In short, many Chinese are busily engaged in doing exactly what the Chinese Communist Party wants them to do - making money as quickly as possible and boosting the economy by spending it almost as rapidly, thereby speeding the process of industrialisation. Along the way a very firmly divided class society is being created.

In Mao's China, even at the height of the cultural revolution, social classes existed and party officials enjoyed privileged lifestyles. What is happening now, however, is that both the encouragement of private enterprise and the One Child Policy are reinforcing



ing those class divisions and creating new ones. Current Chinese policy stipulates that a couple may only have one child. If an abortion is resisted and this quota is exceeded then the government will cut off all financial assistance, and refuse to allocate the parents any extra living space. Their work group may also lose bonuses. Therefore, in the city this law is usually obeyed, but in the countryside it has proved to be virtually unenforceable since the rural population is less dependent on government patronage. If a Chinese couple who have always lived in the city, are well educated and have good connections, obey the state policy, then there is every prospect that their single child will grow up well cared for, well educated, well connected and also eventually rich. But if a Chinese couple living in the countryside don't have a decent private plot but do have two, three or four children, no state benefits are paid for any of their children and it will be very difficult for such a family to get by. The pressure on the children to move to the city to find work as soon as they are old enough will be enormous; no different in fact to the self-same pressures which exist in third world countries. The only thing which might prevent this migration would be the absence of permission from the state without which it is impossible to obtain legitimate accommodation in the city.

Thus in China lifestyles are steadily diverging. One result has been the creation of a sub-class of homeless urban poor. At present this phenomenon is in its early stages. Nevertheless it is already possible to see degrading poverty which would not be out of place in the poorest capitalist countries. For example, in the old capital city of Xian I saw a boy, perhaps ten years old, wrap thick wires round his body so that they dug sharply into his skin. The crowd of bystanders which this attracted was then worked for a few very small

coins. In the modern capital of Beijing I saw a man dressed in rags lying asleep in the dirt alongside a road. Nobody seemed to take any notice or regard it as unusual. Clearly, when people are freed from state control over their economic activities it is possible for some of them to end up living without any welfare provision. Several people I spoke to mentioned the existence of unemployment, and added that because this problem didn't officially exist the unemployed received no help at all.

It is hardly surprising therefore, to discover that crime is prevalent in several parts of China. In a society of rigidly controlled equality it can be virtually impossible to enjoy the fruits of crime, because those around you know exactly what you should have. The system of monitoring by street committees of what each citizen did, which was both so effective and so oppressive during the Cultural Revolution, is now much harder to implement because the new differentials of income make it difficult to know what each citizen 'should' have. Consequently a significant number of illegal residents have moved into big cities, either being sheltered by relatives or bribing officials for the necessary papers. It has thus been possible (and no doubt often necessary) for theft and black-marketeering to return. Leave almost any of the cheaper Chinese hotels and you are likely to be assailed by illegal money changers. Leave a bag beside you in a cafe and you are likely to be warned to keep a firm hold on it. Pickpockets operate on the buses, and when I was singled out for their attentions the boredom on the face of the policeman I reported it to convinced me that this was a routine thing to happen to a 'foreign guest' (this is the official term for a tourist).

The crime wave is being dealt with by a harshly repressive set of



punishments, including widespread use of the death penalty. However, since the conditions which have created it remain intact, it is virtually guaranteed to get worse. Under the old Maoist system efforts were made to take care of the elderly, the sick and the poor. Many jobs were regarded as being an 'iron rice bowl' for life and many people ate out of communal kitchens. Now, with the new stress on personal responsibility, there are growing numbers who lack either the ability or the opportunity to earn a legal living, and who must find other means.

All this raises the question of what the Chinese system has become. Clearly a system which encourages and justifies the steady deepening of differentials in wealth cannot be described as communist. However, there are many features of the system which aren't capitalist either. Success in today's China depends not so much on the ownership of capital but on having good connections. The direction of movement of Chinese society is still determined by the Communist Party, not by the desires of factory managers, bankers and the like. Movement between towns has to be authorised by the state, as do most changes of job or accommodation. The Chinese therefore have something of the worst of both worlds - a one-party state in which a few privileged political leaders determine the policies to be followed by millions, and a competitive system with winners and losers. No doubt there are still those who believe that because the party calls itself a Communist Party and it claims to be moving towards a socialist system, then the society must have some elements of socialism and communism within it. Whatever such elements were present must have been rapidly eliminated. What seems to have happened in China and in other Communist countries is that party rule has created a form of exploitation which is neither communist nor capitalist, but bureaucratic.

## SOLIDARITY BACK ISSUES

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- 13** Two long interviews with Class War; Whither the world state? The English Revolution.
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- 11** The Workers Revolutionary Party's big bust up; Brazil's new democracy; Nicaragua.
- 10** Solidarity celebrates its twenty-fifth birthday; The IQ racket: Burt, Spearman and Eysenck; The Brixton riots.
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## HOW TO ORDER

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In China today, policies are decided by a political elite which can only be joined by showing loyalty to the established ideology. At any moment (it might take no more than the death of the current ideological leader Deng Xiaoping) a few key figures in the Chinese Communist Party could completely alter this ideology, reverse its policies and begin denouncing bourgeois influences.

Indeed this cry was heard as recently as 1986, when quite small scale student demonstrations in Beijing calling for free elections, scared the Party into adopting a more conservative programme for a few months. In other words, the thousand million Chinese are at the mercy of the fears and paranoias of a small clique in offices in Beijing. Even though this clique is currently following many capitalist policies, the system is not capitalist because it is the Party, and not the market or the owners of capital, which determines the priorities for the economy. Successful career progress seems to depend not on the possession of business skills and money but on having passed the correct examinations, having relatives in the right places, or having bribed the right official. It is the Party that determines the nature of these examinations, and it is the Party which controls the vast majority of important appointments. The Party is at the moment fairly popular because it has relaxed the reins of control, and reduced the number of political campaigns which people must pay lip service to. However, the Chinese Communist Party is still a very dangerous institution, which punishes severely both those who challenge its right to rule and those who refuse to submit to the authority of its officials.

For instance, during the Democracy Wall period of 1978-80, people were encouraged to speak openly about their desires for the country. When the line changed they were then crushed for doing so.

Despite the fact that times have changed and a lot of the dissidents' proposals are now state policy many of those who spoke out are still rotting in jail. Policies can come and go but disobedience is unforgivable. In Beijing I came face to face with a victim of more arbitrary excesses. As we walked out of the railway station in the middle of my trip a young Chinese thrust an envelope into the hand of my companion and rushed off. Inside was a plea for someone to publicise the fact that his mother was unfairly imprisoned. She had been told that if she didn't sleep with the local police chief she would be arrested and after she refused he had carried out his threat. Back in London I contacted both the Guardian and Amnesty International. Though sympathetic, both said that there were so many similar cases that they couldn't give this one publicity without more extensive details.

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution much information has emerged about the widespread abuses which took place before the current faction of the Party gained predominance. It may be another ten years before we get details of the current scale of abuses. The post-Maoist system undoubtedly gives the Party the ability to present itself in a more humane light, but it is important to be under no illusions. The Party still dominates, and is subject to no popular control whatsoever. People are far from free and far from equal. The way that ordinary people live their lives is dependent on the machinations of a slow moving bureaucratic machine. A regime which originally came to power justifying its existence in terms of what it could do for the poor has now freed itself from the ideology of equality. The maintenance of its own power has now been elevated into the sole political principle which can never be challenged and discussed. The Chinese now live under a straightforward one-party state.



## ANARCHISM

# Black and red in black and white

Clifford Harper  
Anarchy, a Graphic Guide  
 Camden Press, £5.95

TO THE OUTSIDER anarchism appears to lack coherence, and although its total opposition to authority is respected, the anarchist movement itself seems to live up to the caricature of being little more than a refuge for an ill-assorted

bunch of poets, dreamers, petty criminals and renegade socialists.

In this long overdue introductory guide to anarchism, Clifford Harper corrects that impression. His main achievement is to stress the coherence of anarchism and to explain the main principles of the 'free spirit' that unites pacifists and protagonists behind the black flag. Although his intention is to provide a basic introduction to anarchism he refuses to concentrate solely on giants of anarchism like Bakunin, Kropotkin and Emma Goldman, or on theoretical precursors like Godwin and Proudhon. Instead he incorporates fascinating vignettes about everyday heroes like Louisa Capetillo, Mexican anarchist and champion of women's rights and free



CLIFF HARPER: Self portrait



love, who lived their anarchism with such blazing intensity that they were frequently, like Cuban anarcho-syndicalist Alfredo Lopez, murdered for their activity and beliefs.

A frequent contributor to these pages, Cliff needs little introduction to most readers. Born into a West London working-class family, his schoolboy rebelliousness - truancy, expulsion and petty crime - grew into involvement with the sixties counter-culture and increasing political awareness.

His personal commitment to the anarchist movement has made him the war artist of modern anarchism, and provided him with an intimate knowledge of the movement and ideas which feature in this book, a belated Beginner's Guide to Anarchism, which thankfully avoids the condescension that typifies the genre. Three years ago a collection of his graphic work was published under the title The Education of Desire, but this Graphic Guide provides the first vehicle for his work as a writer.

Arranged under twelve chapter headings, in topic-by-topic sections, the book commences by locating the origins of anarchism in the European movements of religious dissent during the Middle Ages, and then outlines the anarchist characteristics of the English Peasants' Revolt of 1381, noting the particular influence of the 'hedgerow priests' like John Ball.

Cliff defines this early movement as a 'free spirit' anarchism, and traces its influence from small beginnings among religious rebels in Paris, through the Peasants' Revolt, to the Taborite insurrection in 15th century Czechoslovakia, to its culmination in 17th century England among the Diggers and Ranters. In this section the libertarian-communist theory of such writers as Gerrard

Winstanley is closely related to the autonomous actions of ordinary people, whose anarchism expressed itself in army mutinies, tax refusal, disruption in churches and seizure of common land to be worked and enjoyed by all.

The second chapter examines the non-conformist (in both senses of the word) impetus behind the establishment of free communities in North America, and the anti-statist theories which were first articulated during the American Revolution, and subsequently by the sans-culottes and enragés of the French Revolution.

Cliff also explains how the French Revolution inspired William Godwin to write his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. The main principles of the Enquiry and Godwin's ideas are set out in some detail. Unfortunately he neglects to describe Godwin's own impact on the Corresponding Societies, which were the main focus of anti-state activity at the time, and reduces consideration of Mary Wollstonecraft, feminist author and considerable political theorist in her own right, and married to Godwin, to a single paragraph.

The Luddites, too, should have been brought into this section, as their use of direct action, and their implicit critique of industrialism and the factory system anticipated prominent features of anarchism.

Chapter three, 'The Idea', outlines the relationship between the ideas of Stirner, Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin. The latter's support for the 'allies' against Germany in the First World War is mentioned, but under-emphasised, as is the resultant split in the anarchist movement of the time, and it is not true that Kropotkin's pro-war position 'separated him from most anarchists'. Indeed it was the lack of opposition to the war by many sections of the anarchist movement that enabled the



Bolsheviks to seize the anti-militarist mantle, and gave them an influence among those anarchists who formed the initial cadres of the Communist Party in many countries after the Russian revolution.

The Paris Commune provides the starting point for the fourth chapter and is accompanied by a stirring depiction of women at the barricades. Indeed the depiction of women in assertive and revolutionary roles is one of the book's innovations. But oddly Louise Michel, the only anarchist named in connection with the Commune, is mentioned solely in passing, a pity because her colourful life would have given more personality to this episode. Nor is there mention of Elisee Reclus.

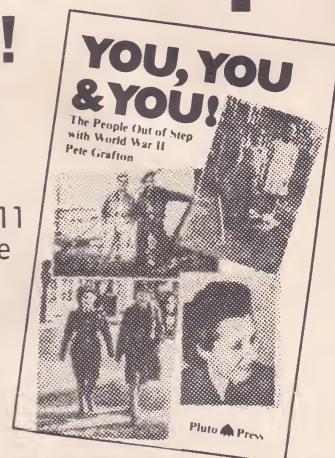
The section on propaganda by deed which comes next, is placed in its context - the aftermath of the massacre of the communards and the violent repression of both the workers movement and anarchism. Anarcho-syndicalism, however, is too important to be reduced to two pages as here, while the resume of art and anarchism which follows is limited to the French neo-impressionists.

The discussion of anarchism in the United States (chapter five) starts with anarchist involvement in the anti-slavery movement, outlines the development of mass strikes in the 1870s, and the formation of the anarchist Black International, as a prelude to the description of the Haymarket affair and the judicial murder of the Chicago anarchists. To my mind this last section should have been longer, dealing as it does with a pivotal moment in anarchist history. The section on Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, and on the formation and militant industrial unionism of the IWW, are well explained, but the chapter concludes unsatisfactorily with an all too brief account of the

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execution of Sacco and Vanzetti. Here Cliff fails to take the opportunity of including some of the most powerful pro-anarchist writing ever, or even portraying the pair.

Revolution in Russia, and the role of the anarchists in it, Dada, and the German revolution of 1918-19, are outlined in chapters seven and eight, concluding with the civil war in Spain and the defeat of anarchism. Curiously Cliff omits any explanation of the anarchist part in the resistance against fascism during the Second World War, and yet it was widespread. Recent research indicates that the anarchist role within the French Resistance was extremely important, while the movements in Poland and Hungary were all but destroyed by the savage repression their opposition brought down upon them. While this is neglected the heroic insurrection of the Hungarian people in 1956 is, correctly, dealt with in depth in chapter nine.

The remaining three chapters sketch the contours of contemporary anarchism. The International Situationists, the Provos and the development of the counter culture; May '68; the revolt against work; feminism, pacifism, and ecology; all are lucidly explained and their links with anarchism demonstrated.

One of the most obvious omissions from the book is the lack of reference to Malatesta, whose actions and ideas have been closer to the heartbeat of modern anarchism than most other anarchist thinkers. His action-packed life, his consistency and passionate idealism, make him the ideal subject for the artist.

There has always been a strong connection between avant-garde art and anarchism, and in his illustrations Cliff has drawn on several of the styles and artists connected with the movement - expressionism and the work of Frans

Masereel being two examples. In a different way he has reworked several standard accounts of anarchism to produce the text, drawing (perhaps too heavily) on George Woodcock's somewhat lop-sided survey of anarchist movements and ideas. The effect of Cliff's distillation of such standard accounts is, however, to emphasise the continuity of certain central ideas while at the same time stressing the variety of forms anarchism has adopted.

Cliff has set a new standard by providing what is quite simply the best introduction to anarchism that there is. If the book transmits this message of plurality and coherence to anarchists and non-anarchists alike, as well as convincing more people of the necessity of anarchism (as I suspect it will) then Cliff will have scored a double success.

MARTYN EVERETT

## WORKERS COUNCILS

# What Iran could do again

Assef Bayat

Workers and Revolution in Iran:  
A Third World Experience of  
Workers' Control  
Zed Press, £7.95

FEW REVOLUTIONARIES - not counting religious fanatics - would think of looking to Iran for inspiration, now that years of relentless repression have obliterated any optimism engendered by the overthrow of the Shah. It may come as a surprise to many readers that anything occurred there which could plausibly be described as having much to do with workers' control. But Assef Bayat's book presents evidence to show that quite a lot did happen, of interest not only to



specialists in Iran or the Third World, but to the rest of us as well.

Of course there were problems about conducting field research on such a subject in Iran in 1980-81, and the author had to make the most of limited opportunities. He describes his "guerilla-type tactic of research - ask and run", evidently not a bad system to judge by results. Even when he arranges the material in figures and tables, its direct human relevance is clear. At the same time, this is not a piece of myth-mongering; Bayat tells us that he was familiar with romanticised views of the Iranian workers' councils ("shuras" in Farsi), but that his decision to study them in detail arose from his own observation of what was going on. Likewise, his evident political awareness has not led him to press awkward facts into a rigid framework.

There is a certain amount of theory, for those who need it, orientating the project in the context of workers' control, as distinct from "participation" and all that. Then we are given the background to the Iranian experience, with analysis of the process of industrial development and "proletarianisation", emphasising special features like the effects of migration from the countryside, the Shah's political dictatorship, and the contradictions and contrasts involved. Religion inevitably rears its ugly head, and an attempt is made to explain its role as a cultural form, the point of reference of socio-cultural activities, subject to change and modification in accordance with workers' own socio-economic and political ends. We are shown how collective action and workers' resistance developed before and during the revolutionary crisis; the demands made by the workers are examined, and their implications, missed by even workerist-type organisations, are brought out. Real attitudes were complex and various, not to be

categorised in a dismissive fashion as merely "spontaneous". Actions were carefully thought out, planned and put into practice through strike committees and mass meetings, without intervention from outside leaders or instigators, at least until a later stage of the process, when left-wing groups, students, and finally mullahs, began to mix in.

This strike-committee movement remained dispersed and fragmented until the pro-Khomeini 'Committee for the Co-Ordination and Investigation of Strikes' began to assert itself, whereupon conflicts immediately arose. By the end of January 1979, that is even before the actual insurrection, 118 production units and a few public services had been persuaded back to work, allegedly in the interests of the revolution. Some saw more clearly whose interests were being served; shortly afterwards, the leader of the oil strikers resigned in protest against the "dogmatic reactionary clergy" and the "new form of oppression under the guise of religion".

According to Bayat, the workers had been in struggle as an oppressed mass, not a unified class force, but the revolutionary crisis had nonetheless furnished the basis for proletarian organisations whose form was present in embryo. There were instances of cooperation between two or three industries, and of non-industrial councils taking over a number of cities and towns and establishing themselves in the armed forces. In one case, twenty-seven industrial groups and trades were linked in a Solidarity Council. From this sort of background the "shuras" emerged.

Shuras, as described here, are shop-floor organisations whose elected executive committee represented all the employees of a factory or industrial group, whose major concern was to achieve workers' control, and which took the offensive to this end. They were not under the influence of



outside leftist groups, and did not see themselves as a vehicle for social change, but for the transformation of authority relations in the industrial area. Such a programme inevitably meant struggle against the post-revolutionary regime as much as (and very soon much more than) against survivals of the old. Internal contradictions as well as external pressures are seen to have been too powerful for the shuras. Each aspect is explored in depth: on the one hand, a catalogue of repressive laws, undermining tactics, and outright attack; on the other, reports and quotes from the factories, for example, "The revolution was made to determine our own destinies... We did not want the situation where one or a few made decisions for two thousand". Despite such encouraging noises, workers who had been running their own workplaces decided in the end that they really needed managers, and asked for their return.

Apparently almost the entire left was surprised and confused by the shuras, overlooking their real significance while welcoming them with appropriate rhetoric, and assessing them by reference to their members' political tendency rather than by the extent and nature of the control they achieved. At times the author seems to go to the opposite extreme, glossing over what might have been the more negative aspects of this control in practice, for example where young workers pressed for the instant dismissal as a "counter-revolutionary element" of anyone whose face didn't fit, and claimed to know better than people with specialised (for example, medical) knowledge. The role of women, too, we are left to infer, must have been played largely off-stage; of course there are reasons for this, but they should not be omitted from the analysis.

Not everything that we see as negative is as bad as it seems, though, given the "culture of

insecurity" that goes with prolonged repression, and leads to phenomena like "tactical legalism" - vociferous but often superficial or self-interested "support" for the dominant ideology. This occurs in the use of officially sanctioned chants to disrupt official meetings, or clamouring for time off for prayers as a hindrance to production. Thus any channel is used to advance the covert struggle, and, Bayat says, there will continue to be periodic eruptions, confounding those not on the masses' wavelength. And a quote to cheer us up: "Just as we brought down the Shah's regime, we are able to bring down any other regime".

We may be tempted to ask what they're waiting for, but of course it's far from being as simple as that; the point is that the struggle has not been either completely suppressed or coopted, even after so many and such varied efforts (the Islamic Associations, determined to operate in all workplaces and social contexts, and arguably reaching parts other totalitarian regimes couldn't reach, deserve and receive particular attention). Still, in 1984-85, two hundred "incidents" concerning payrises, delayed wages, and such, were reported; there were ninety (illegal) strikes, and in sixty-five per cent of them workers won their cases, most spectacularly at the Esfahan steel mill, where 27,000 workers won a fifteen-day strike. The book's prognosis is of continuing self-perpetuating industrial crisis, unless an alternative democratic political form could allow the setting up of the sort of special third-world workers' control for which the last chapter gives a recipe. Unfortunately the libertarian tradition and historical experience are by-passed in favour of more statist roads. But the core of the book is the Iranian experience, which is certainly worth finding out about, even if it wasn't quite like Spain in '36 or Hungary in '56.

LIZ WILLIS